

Council – 7th January 2019

Response to the Petition: “Stop pending and further cuts to adult social care by Walsall Metropolitan Council

Service: Adult Social Care

Wards: All

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Rose Martin

1. Summary

1.1 A petition was presented to the Council on 14th November 2018. The petition calls on the Council to “Stop pending and further cuts to adult social care by Walsall Metropolitan Council”. At the point of submission, the petition had received over 1500 signatures in support of their recommendation: ie that the Council “stop cutting essential services that are needed for quality of life in vulnerable adults.”

2. Recommendations

2.1 That full council note the response to the petition

3. Report detail

3.1 Statement of on-line Petition:

On Wednesday 24th October, Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council, decided to scrap an alarm system that is a lifeline for many disabled adults, and elderly people across the borough. The alarm is designed to be worn around the neck or wrist, and is pressed if the service user needs immediate assistance due to a fall, or similar situation. The contact centre then attempts to contact the service user, and if the service user doesn't respond, they call the listed emergency contact. This service costs the council approximately £1.3 million per year.

The service is currently used by 7000 people within the borough, both elderly and disabled. It is literally a lifeline for those who use it, not only enabling them to get emergency help, but also for their carers, who are able to take short breaks away from the home without worry of their loved one being left on the floor.

Despite spending £3m to upgrade their IT systems, it has been deemed that £1.3m on a lifesaving system is not 'viable'.

'The service is no longer fit for service without significant investment that the council does not have.' Councillor Rose Martin.

In addition, there have been further cuts to adult social care within the borough. 29th September 2017 saw the permanent closure of the Independent Living Centre. The ILC offered support in terms of mobility scooter rental, aids and adaptations, occupational therapy assessments, blue badge assessments, as well as sign posting to support for benefits advice, health and social care support.

Early 2018 saw the closure of the Welfare Rights Team. This service offered the vulnerable and disabled the chance to receive expert advice and support with applications for benefits and grants to improve the quality of life for those who were in need. The Welfare Rights Team now only offers a skeletal service.

Overall, those requesting help and support from adult social services, are often being left months and months without access to services that are desperately needed, and essential for long term quality of life for the elderly and disabled. Services being cut, budgets being cut, teams being stripped to the bare minimum, are all causing extreme distress to users who need access to help and support in able to have any form of quality of life.

We, the undersigned, hereby request Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council stop cutting essential services that are needed for quality of life in vulnerable adults.

3.2 Response to petition:

Given significant cuts to the Councils Budget since 2010 of £173m over recent years. The Council has had to make some difficult decisions about how we spend our budget. We have a duty and responsibility to provide a number of services as defined by law. At the same time a number of services have been delivered to promote and enhance the quality of life for Walsall citizens. The sustained level of cuts to our budgets over recent years has led both the current administration and previous administrations to consider how we can continue to deliver on our statutory duties against a backdrop of increased demand for services and overall reduction in our budgets.

Against this backdrop of cuts to the Council Budget, we have invested £15m in the last two years specifically in relation to maintaining our statutory services. The investment was used to fund ongoing pressures related to demand led services, and contractual increases to the provider market. However, this has meant that we have been unable to invest in many non-statutory services.

The previous administration took the difficult decision to cease the provision of non-statutory Adult Social Care services. On the basis of that decision it was agreed that savings of circa £0.567m were to be delivered against the Community Alarm Service, split over 2 financial years, £0.190m for 2017/18 and £0.377m for 2018/19. Despite making these savings, the decision was not enacted at the time. This, alongside a need for investment in the Community Alarm Service to maintain its functions, led the Adult Social Care directorate to a position where they were forecasting a full year overspend of £0.888m. Given the need to maintain a balanced budget, and deliver our statutory duties, there is no scope within the Adult Social Care budget available to cover the deficit.

Other saving against the Adult Social Care budget at the time, were;

- 2017/18 - £5.020m relating to reduction in Universal Services, review of client's packages/placement costs and the introduction of new Community Based Charging policy.

- 2018/19 - £6.148m relating to the full year impact of reduction of Universal Services and review of client's packages/ placement costs.

The petition text refers to investment into the Council's IT systems at the expense of the Community Alarm Service; it is worth highlighting that the Councils IT infrastructure has seen significant under investment for a number of years as the Council has sought to protect front line services from cuts as much as possible. However we have now reached a point where we can no longer sustain this lack of investment in IT, as we need to ensure our IT systems can continue to support our core business, and lack of investment now could present a real risk of failure going forward.

It is clear that funding non-statutory services has an impact on the amount of funding we can put in to our statutory services. In terms of Adult Social Care, it affects our ability to provide key services to those with the greatest level of need ie those with eligible care needs and those in need at risk of harm.

We are fully committed to providing services for people to live independently, for as long as possible within their own homes and as part of our communities. Given the available budget, the decision taken in relation to the Community Alarm Service and other non-statutory services enables us to protect and fund our statutory Adult Social Care services. In reaching these decisions, we have ensured that Adult Social Care does not need to find the budget deficit elsewhere, as such, we are protecting these services as best we can against the back drop of cuts in the overall Council budget.

The research undertaken specifically in relation to the Community Alarm Service (CAS) provision, was not able to find any authority nationally that does not levy a charge and Walsall was the only Council across the Black Country that does not currently charge. CAS was free to all Walsall residents, with 90 % of service users identified as having no assessed social care need.

4. Council priorities

- 4.1 The Community Alarm Service, like the Independent Living Centre (ILC), and Welfare rights are not a statutory services that need to be provided directly by the Council. There are many good quality alternative providers in the market place for Community Alarms, and the Council still provides the Blue Badge service and some other services, which were offered through the ILC. Welfare Rights information advice, guidance and support can be accessed through other organisations, such as Citizens Advice.

We recognise that all our services are valuable to those who used them, and had we not been faced with significant cuts to our overall budgets, we may have been in a position to invest more money into the Adult Social Care budgets. However, we have to acknowledge that we are not in that position, and as such, without greater investment, the members of this Council will continue to have difficult decisions to make.

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